

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6957

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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EC BRUSSELS 279

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MT

SUBJ: SECOND WEEK OF MALTESE ELECTION CAMPAIGN PASSES QUIETLY

REF: VALLETTA 1004, 0989, 0986, 0984

1. THE SECOND WEEK OF THE MALTESE ELECTION CAMPAIGN WAS EVEN QUIETER THAN THE FIRST, AT LEAST IN ITS IMPACT ON THE DAILY LIVES OF THE AVERAGE MALTESE. THUS FAR, PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF'S WARNING AGAINST FURTHER POLITICAL VIOLENCE HAS BEEN COMPLETELY EFFECTIVE AND, AS A RESULT, THE CAMPAIGN HAS BECOME MUCH LESS FLAMBOYANT THAN HAD BEEN EXPECTED.

2. OF COURSE, BOTH THE LABOR AND NATIONALIST PARTIES ARE

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BUSY WITH INTERMINABLE MEETINGS, RALLIES, PRESS CONFERENCES

AND TELEVISION APPEARANCES. HOWEVER, THERE ARE DISTINCT SIGNS THAT, EXCEPT FOR THE MORE RABID SUPPORTERS OF THE RESPECTIVE CANDIDATES, THESE ONGOING ACTIVITIES ARE HAVING LITTLE EFFECT ON THE NORMAL SUMMER HOLIDAY PLEASURES OF THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE MALTESE VOTERS. THE LARGE, OR "MASS" MEETINGS OF BOTH PARTIES ARE WELL ATTENDED, BUT THE SPEAKERS ARE SINGULARLY FAILING TO PRODUCE MUCH CROWD ENTHUSIASM, EXCEPT WHEN THE TELEVISION CAMERAMEN ARE PRESENT TO TAKE THEIR FOOTAGE FOR THE DAILY NEWS PROGRAMS.

3. THE VARIOUS CANDIDATES "STANDING" FOR THE SIXTY-FIVE PARLIAMENTARY SEATS HAVE NOW BEEN OFFICIALLY NOMINATED. THESE ARE 88 LABOR CANDIDATES AND 80 NATIONALIST ONES, ALTHOUGH MANY ARE CONTESTING TWO DISTRICTS (WHICH IS ACCEPTABLE UNDER MALTESE LAW). THEREFORE, THE NUMBER OF NAMES ON THE BALLOTS IN SEPTEMBER WILL TOTAL ALMOST 230. (COMMENT: IT IS A GREAT STATUS SYMBOL TO RUN FOR PARLIAMENT IN MALTA, AND IT ONLY COSTS FORTY MALTESE POUNDS, OR LESS THAN \$100, TO DO SO. HENCE, THERE ARE MANY CANDIDATES WITH NO CHANCE WHATSOEVER IN THE FIELD. END COMMENT).

4. THERE ARE SOME SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE LIST OF CANDIDATES COMPARED WITH THAT OF THE LAST ELECTION IN 1971. MOST IMPORTANT, THE SMALL PROGRESSIVE CONSTITUTIONAL PARTY (WHICH RECEIVED ONE PERCENT OF THE VOTES, BUT NO PARLIAMENTARY SEATS IN 1971), IS NOT CONTESTING THE 1976 ELECTION. THEREFORE THIS WILL BE A STRAIGHT LABOR-NATIONALIST CONTEST, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE MALTA BECAME INDEPENDENT IN 1964. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE PREVIOUS PCP VOTE WILL GO TO THE NATIONALISTS THIS YEAR.

5. ALL OF THE PRESENT NATIONALIST MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ARE RUNNING AGAIN. ON THE LABOR SIDE, THERE ARE TWO NOTABLE ABSENCES. DR. ALBERT HYZLER, MINISTER OF HEALTH, AND OLD MINTOFF ASSOCIATE WHO HAS BEEN IN PARLIAMENT SINCE 1947, IS ABSENT FOR "PERSONAL AND HEALTH REASONS". HYZLER WAS ONE OF FOUR LABOR PARLIAMENTARIANS WHO WAS ELECTED IN TWO DISTRICTS IN 1971 (LATER STEPPING ASIDE IN ONE OF THE DISTRICTS, AS THE LAW PERMITS, FOR ANOTHER LABOR CANDIDATE WITH A SMALLER NUMBER OF VOTES).
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THE OTHER LABOR ABSENTEE IS DR. JOSEPH MICALLEF STAFRACE, A YOUNG LAWYER FROM VALLETTA. APPOINTED MINISTER OF TRADE IN 1971, MICALLEF STAFRACE SOON DISAGREED WITH MINTOFF ON POLICY MATTERS AND RESIGNED AS MINISTER AFTER ONLY A FEW MONTHS IN OFFICE. HE SPENT THE REMAINDER OF HIS FIVE-YEAR PARLIAMENTARY TERM AS AN UNEASY LABOR BACK-BENCHER, BUT COULD NEVER ACTUALLY BRING HIMSELF TO VOTE AGAINST MINTOFF IN PARLIAMENT. RETURNING TO THE

LIST OF LABOR CANDIDATES, IS EMMANUEL ATTARD BEZZINA, ANOTHER OLD MINTOFF FRIEND WHO WAS IN PARLIAMENT FROM 1947 TO 1971 BUT WAS DEFEATED IN THE LAST ELECTION. MINTOFF APPOINTED ATTARD BEZZINA AS SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE AS A CONSOLATION PRIZE, BUT HE IS NOW TRYING TO REGAIN HIS LOST SEAT IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT.

6. THE ELECTION MANIFESTOES OF THE TWO PARTIES HAVE CREATED VERY LITTLE STIR AMONG THE VOTERS. FOR ONE THING, THEY ARE BOTH VERY WORDY AND LACKING IN FOCUS. THE CONSERVATIVE TIMES OF MALTA HAS DESCRIBED THE MANIFESTOES AS "EXTREMELY BORING", WITH THE LABOR ONE CONSISTING OF A LONG LIST OF "BIG ACHIEVEMENTS", AND THE NATIONALIST ONE COMPOSED OF A LONG LIST OF "BIG PROMISES". ON THE OTHER HAND, THE TIMES FINDS THE CHOICE BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES TO BE A CLEAR ONE, WITH THE MALTESE BEING OFFERED "NON-ALIGNED SOCIALISM WITH MORE STATE CONTROLS" BY THE LABORITES, AND THE NATIONALISTS ADVOCATING "A WESTERN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC WAY OF LIFE WITH THE ACCENT ON INDIVIDUALITY".

7. TWO PLANKS IN THE NATIONALIST PLATFORM SEEM TO BE WORRYING THE LABORITES, AT LEAST TO THE EXTENT THAT SPEAKERS AT LABOR RALLIES CONTINUE TO DENOUNCE THEM AS IMPRACTICAL AND DESIGNED ONLY TO "TRICK AND ELECTORATE". THE FIRST IS A PROPOSAL GRADUALLY TO "ABOLISH" INCOME TAX AND REPLACE IT WITH A SALES TAX. THE NATIONALISTS SAY THEY WILL BEGIN THIS PROCESS BY INCREASING THE STANDARD DEDUCTION AND BY COMPLETELY EXEMPTING FARMERS AND FISHERMEN FROM INCOME TAX PAYMENTS. THE SECOND PROPOSAL IS A SOMEWHAT COMPLICATED "POUND FOR POUND" SCHEME DESIGNED TO ENABLE MALTESE WITH INVESTMENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM TO REPATRIATE THEIR FUNDS WITHOUT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SUFFERING A THIRTY PERCENT EXCHANGE LOSS BECAUSE OF THE DISPARITY BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND MALTESE POUNDS. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT LABOR LEADERS ARE NERVOUS ABOUT THE POSSIBLE APPEAL TO THE VOTERS OF THESE TWO NATIONALIST PLANS.

WIGGINS

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8. ON THE LABOR SIDE, MINTOFF HIMSELF TOLD A PUBLIC
METTING THIS WEEK THAT THE LABOR PARTY'S "ONLY PROMISE"
FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS IS "MORE WORK, WHICH, IN TURN,
WILL PROVIDE MORE WEALTH FOR THE MALTESE NATION AND ITS
PEOPLE". BOTH MINTOFF AND THE OTHER LABOR CANDIDATES
ARE RUNNING HARD ON THEIR RECORD OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS,
WHILE CLAIMING THAT ONLY THROUGH A CONTINUATION OF THEIR
BRAND OF "SOCIALISM" CAN MALTA'S FUTURE BE ASSURED.

9. COMMENT: DESPITE CONTINUING EFFORTS BY BOTH PARTIES
TO GENERATE PUBLIC EXCITEMENT AS ELECTION DAY APPROACHES,
THERE IS A WIDESPREAD FEELING THAT THE POLITICIANS ARE
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LARGELY SPINNING THEIR WHEELS AT THIS POINT. THE CAMPAIGN

LITERALLY HAS BEEN GOING ON SINCE THE LAST ELECTION IN 1971, AND EVEN THE MALTESE (WHOSE TOLERANCE OF AND INTEREST IN PERPETUAL POLITICKING IS AN INHERENT PART OF THEIR WAY OF LIFE) WILL BE EXCEEDINGLY GRATEFUL WHEN IT IS ALL OVER. IN THE MEANTIME, EXCEPT FOR THE PARTY DIEHARDS, SUMMER DAYS AT THE BEACHES ARE OBVIOUSLY MUCH MORE ATTRACTIVE THAN STILL ANOTHER OUTDOOR POLITICAL MEETING. THIS COMING WEEK, WITH THE CANDIDATES OFFICIALLY NOMINATED, EMPHASIS WILL SWITCH TO DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVASSING IN THE VARIOUS DISTRICTS. AT THIS STAGE, LEADERS OF BOTH PARTIES SAY IN PUBLIC THEY ARE CONFIDENT OF VICTORY IN SEPTEMBER. BUT IN PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE EMBASSY THEY DISPLAY MUCH LESS ASSURANCE. THE FACT IS THAT NONE OF THEM REALLY KNOWN HOW THE LARGE NUMBER OF NEW, UNTESTED MALTESE VOTERS WILL REACT TO THE TORRENT OF WORDS BEING THROWN AT THEM. "IT'S A PUZZLEMENT", AND THAT MAKES FOR VERY NERVOUS POLITICIANS. END COMMENT WIGGINS

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